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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SHANGHAI 000337

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SUBJECT: VOLUNTEERISM IN SHANGHAI

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1. (SBU) Summary. Despite ample opportunities for people to volunteer, local volunteer organizations still have problems attracting people. Interlocutors blamed the lack of interest in volunteering to the absence of legislation on volunteers, the lack of a system to track someone's volunteer experience and to the lack of flexibility in many volunteer programs. However, both local governments and the central government are "conservatively encouraging" people to volunteer for non-controversial programs in the environmental, health and educational field. End Summary

#### Shanghai Volunteer Association

2. (SBU) In mid-July, Poloff and FSN Political Assistant met with representatives of the Shanghai Volunteer Association (SVA) to discuss their activities. SVA is a governmental organization and was established in July 1997. It plays a leading role in organizing and coordinating volunteer activities for large official events in Shanghai such as 2007 Special Olympics, 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and Shanghai World Expo 2010. According to SVA Office Manager Du Guowei, Shanghai now has over one million registered volunteers from five SVA branch organizations including Shanghai Family Volunteer Association, Shanghai Worker Volunteer Association, Shanghai Community Volunteer Association, Shanghai Youth Volunteer Association and Shanghai Professional Volunteer Group. Over 80 percent of the volunteers are university students. The SVA's primary responsibility, according to Du, is to provide work plan, management service and guidance to the city's volunteer programs. In addition, it is in charge of volunteer recruitment, registration, training, personnel dispatch and job performance evaluation. It often recruits people at college campuses. In order to attract more people to participate in their volunteer programs, the SVA provides registered volunteers with a bank card that gives its users discounts at various venues in Shanghai.

#### Volunteers Wanted

3. (SBU) According to Du, in comparison to other cities, Shanghai's volunteer programs are more developed. However, it has not been easy finding volunteers. Du blamed this on the lack of laws governing volunteers and also the lack of a record keeping system to track the work of volunteers. Therefore, the SVA is currently creating an online system for outside users to check individual volunteer's work record. Du added that the Shanghai Municipal Government plans on introducing guidelines on volunteer activities in 2009 in preparation for Shanghai World Expo 2010. Du assessed that the SVA is in its "infant period" and more needed to be done to develop the organization. He

noted in particular that the SVA did not have much interaction with the private sector and asked for the Consulate's assistance in making connections to U.S. companies.

#### More Flexibility Needed

14. (SBU) During a luncheon with CSR Manager of AmCham Shanghai Office Oliver Ye on July 15, Ye noted that it is difficult for full time employees to participate in government run volunteer programs. These programs often lack flexibility. For example, for one government volunteer program, volunteers were asked to participate in two two-day training courses during the week. This is impossible for many workers and most volunteers are university students. Nevertheless, he is trying to find way opportunities for USG companies to participate in volunteer programs. He also noted that volunteers in China like to only participate in one-time activities and do not develop long-term relations with the organization they volunteer for.

#### Non-Governmental Volunteering is "Conservatively Encouraged"

15. (SBU) According to Jim Zhai, the founder of a Shanghai-based labor NGO called Shanghai Hua Guang Youth Employment Service Center, the number of opportunities for people to volunteer with non-governmental organizations is also increasing. He noted that local and central governments are "conservatively encouraging" people to volunteer but only on safe issues. The government encourages people to volunteer for NGOs and governmental programs that assist the elderly, protect the environment, and help people with HIV/AIDS. However, the government pays little attention to disadvantaged groups like migrant workers. In addition, most labor NGOs are subjected to registration restrictions and strict supervision. He did not

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think that recent earthquake in Sichuan will have a long-term impact on the number of people volunteering for programs. One long-term trend he sees is that fewer people are interested in volunteering for large programs such as the Special Olympics, instead many people are looking for more complex volunteering opportunities and are seeking out volunteer opportunities at NGOs. This is especially true among university students. He sees this as a positive trend and believes that volunteering at NGOs help students to develop a better understanding of civil society.

#### Comment

16. (SBU) As social services decrease in China, NGOs are taking on more of the burden of helping those in need. But to provide those services, NGOs need volunteers as well as financial support. Hopefully interest in social NGOs like Mr. Zhai's NGO will continue to grow and help to foster a more diverse civil society.

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